



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

STATE NATURAL AREAS

2016 VOLUNTEER REPORT



Thank you volunteers

2016 was a fantastic year for State Natural Areas in large part to the growing impact of volunteers. The number of groups helping care for these special places doubled to 36 and increased sevenfold, from 467 to 3,514 acres, the area benefitting from their efforts.

As impressive as those numbers are, however, they tell only part of the story, a point brought home to me on the day of our annual thank you picnic for volunteers. I had arrived early to grill some meat and as the smoke rolled upwards I took a moment to think about what was going to happen that day. After a lunch together we would hike through a canyon in Sauk County in a State Natural Area closed to the public because of its fragility and learn about plant ecology and geology. I was excited to have this experience with our volunteers.

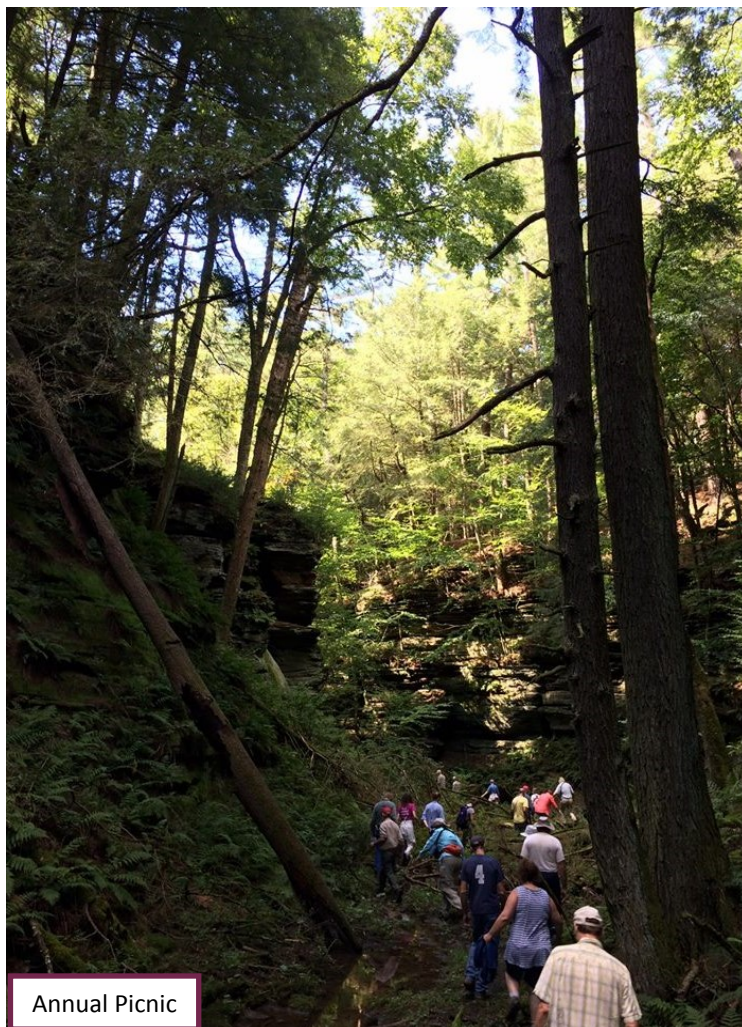
The hike lived up to the billing. Rocky cliffs and large pines protected us in a little river valley carved out thousands of years ago. Water dripped off walls so close together we almost had to squeeze through them in several places. We paused at the Wisconsin River and marveled at what massive amount of water must have created the canyon we were in. My eyes were full and I was satisfied.

Thanks to the work of our many volunteers we are creating little moments like this all over the state. Uncovering an oak tree, creating a view, protecting a rare bird or plant from invasive species, removing that chunk of brush, getting new plants started. We are uncovering new sights and protecting old ones that give a sense of satisfaction and awe to volunteer and explorer alike.

Thank you to every volunteer out there creating these moments. I hope as you look through the pictures and stories in this report, you are able to take a moment to get a sense of wonder/satisfaction with what is going on. And if you are just learning about what we do and think it looks cool – try it out, start creating!

Jared Urban

Volunteer Coordinator, SNA Program



Annual Picnic

Cover photo © Jerry Newman

Steward of the year

Zach Kastern's interest in planting native wildflowers led him to volunteer at State Natural Areas in the Southern Kettle Moraine Forest and has grown into his spending hundreds of hours caring for some of Wisconsin's best remaining wetlands, woodlands, prairies and oak savannas. He was named the 2016 Volunteer Steward of the Year and received a plaque during our September picnic to recognize volunteers' efforts.

"Zach started volunteering in winter 2012 and immediately was engaged in what was going on and had a natural curiosity and interest in plants and natural communities," says Jared Urban, who coordinates the State Natural Areas Volunteer Program. "Now, as one of the lead volunteers, he shares that love of these remnant sites with others, is thoughtful about how to engage others, and makes workdays a fun experience for everyone attending."

Kastern and Ginny Coburn together organize and run monthly volunteer workdays at several of the state natural areas within the forest boundaries, sites including Kettle Moraine Oak Opening State Natural Area and Bluff Creek State Natural Area.

Those volunteers contributed 674 hours in 2015 on state natural areas and Kastern alone has contributed more than 275 volunteers hours since 2013. They've addressed threats to natural areas by pulling or spraying invasive plants, establishing new prairies and oak openings by collecting and planting seeds, and cutting down and burning buckthorn and honeysuckle.

Kastern was surprised to be chosen for the award but happy it came to the Southern Kettle Moraine area. "There are several people I'd like to name but I think Ginny Coburn is one who really deserves recognition as well since we've basically been operating as partners during workdays and preparing for them," he says.

Kastern got involved in caring for State Natural Areas because he wanted to plant native wildflowers on his 3-acre yard "but I didn't know exactly what that meant. I originally thought that all I had to do was look around along the road-sides to figure it out," he says. "But as I began to read and learn I realized that wasn't the case."



Zach Kastern (left) receiving the 2016 Volunteer Steward of the Year during the September picnic at the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area from Jared Urban. Photo @ Jerry Newman.

"A presentation given by Matt Zine (who leads SNA field staff in southern Wisconsin) and volunteer workdays offered by Jared Urban really opened my eyes to what plant communities were here and remain in pieces and I've realized how close we are to losing them," Kastern says. "I've been learning how to recognize and hopefully rescue them and now I'm enjoying trying to get other people to see what I see and help me with the work. Our native landscape was breathtaking and I want to restore it."

Kastern recently designed and constructed the interior of a new enclosed trailer unit housing tools for workdays. He also posts pictures and updates on the Facebook page he created, called Southern Kettle Moraine SNA Volunteers, helps UW-Whitewater students at restoration workdays and leads field trips.

When he is not working on state natural areas, Kastern is often restoring his own property, getting his neighbors on board with work at his neighborhood conservancy, and volunteering for the Prairie Enthusiasts -- Glacial Prairies chapter.

Where we worked in 2016

West Central
6 sites impacted
314 hours worked
70 acres covered
3 groups

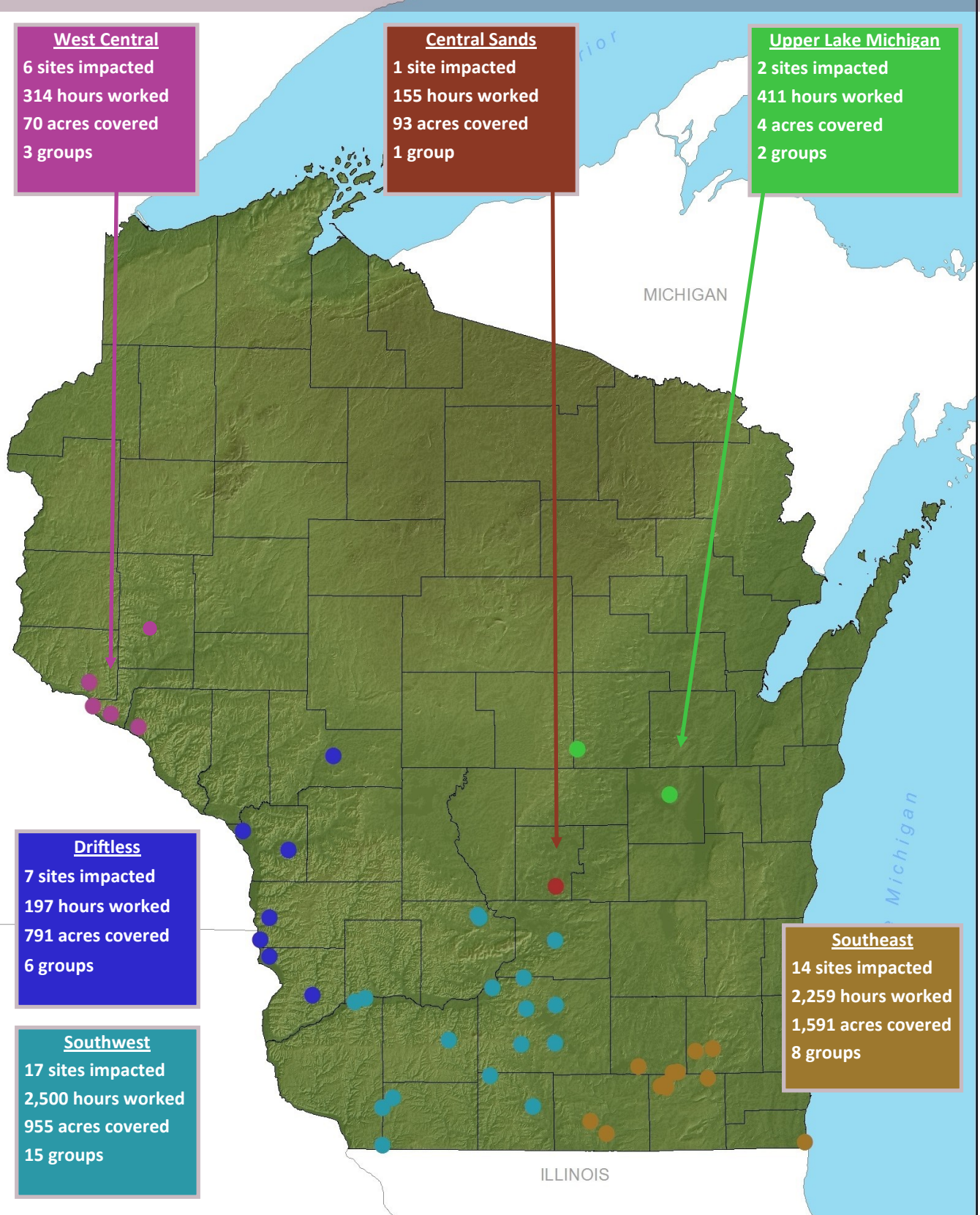
Central Sands
1 site impacted
155 hours worked
93 acres covered
1 group

Upper Lake Michigan
2 sites impacted
411 hours worked
4 acres covered
2 groups

Driftless
7 sites impacted
197 hours worked
791 acres covered
6 groups

Southwest
17 sites impacted
2,500 hours worked
955 acres covered
15 groups

Southeast
14 sites impacted
2,259 hours worked
1,591 acres covered
8 groups



Where we worked in 2016

SITE	HOURS	VALUE	ACRES	VOLUNTEERS	COUNTY
Allen Creek Wetlands	64	\$1,508	10	8	Jefferson
Battle Bluff	20	\$485	56	2	Vernon
Bauer Brockway Barrens	8	\$197	15	1	Jackson
Belmont Prairies	5	\$126	1	1	Lafayette
Beulah Bog	11	\$293	4	2	Walworth
Blue River Bluffs (Chezik Unit)	8	\$188	2	1	Grant
Blue River Sand Barrens	2	\$47	1	1	Grant
Bluff Creek	324	\$7,757	29	34	Walworth
Cherokee Marsh	131	\$3,120	5	11	Dane
Chiwaukee Prairie	810	\$19,707	148	56	Kenosha
Clover Valley Fen	18	\$454	1	6	Walworth
Empire Prairies	103	\$2,427	2	38	Dane
Fern Dell	38	\$909	25	2	Sauk
Genesee Oak Opening	12	\$283	36	4	Waukesha
Great River Trail Prairies	8	\$195	40	1	LaCrosse
Hardscrabble Prairie	57	\$1,343	32	2	Lafayette
Hogback Prairies	40	\$961	56	3	Crawford
Ipswich Prairie	24	\$596	1	6	Lafayette
Kessler Railroad Prairie	39	\$941	6	2	Rock
Kettle Moraine Oak Opening	154	\$3,646	347	29	Jefferson
Lodi Marsh	75	\$1,837	1	15	Dane
Lower Chippewa River	165	\$3,915	12	52	Buffalo, Dunn
Maiden Rock Bluff	128	\$3,027	11	29	Pepin
Mazomanie Oak Barrens	345	\$8,790	97	21	Dane
Messinger Dry Prairie and Savanna Preserve	133	\$3,213	15	29	Walworth
Mirror Lake Pine Oak Forest	8	\$195	2	1	Sauk
Morgan Coulee	5	\$129	47	1	Pierce
Muralt Bluff Prairie (Stauffer Unit)	191	\$4,533	12	15	Green
Oak Coulee Woods	39	\$954	216	3	Crawford
Observatory Hill	155	\$3,673	93	12	Marquette
Oshkosh-Larsen Trail Prairies	42	\$990	1	7	Winnebago
Ottawa Lake Fen	116	\$2,795	7	1	Waukesha
Pope Lake	369	\$8,716	3	29	Waupaca
Ridgeway Pine Relict	901	\$21,288	56	22	Iowa
Rock River Prairie	212	\$5,106	146	7	Rock
Rocky Run Oak Savanna	49	\$1,193	693	5	Columbia
Romance Prairie	16	\$385	34	2	Vernon
Rush Creek	66	\$1,577	374	4	Crawford
Sugar River Wetlands	380	\$8,953	12	103	Dane
Undisclosed Site	257	\$6,187	87	6	Rock
Waubesa Wetlands	49	\$1,173	693	5	Dane
York Prairie	134	\$3,289	8	23	Green
Young Prairie	109	\$2,635	765	21	Walworth
TOTALS	5,820	\$139,737	3,514	324+	

 **\$ 139,737 of Value**  **3,514 Acres Covered**

 **5,820 Hours**  **36 Volunteer Groups**

What we did in 2016

Forty-two State Natural Areas benefitted from volunteers' time and energy in 2016. These examples provided by lead volunteers at several sites illustrate the type of work volunteers do. If you want to volunteer at these or other sites, visit dnr.wi.gov and search "SNA volunteers" to see work day dates and to sign up for notices of workdays. Or contact coordinator Jared Urban: jared.urban@wisconsin.gov or (608)267-0797.

Chiwaukee Prairie: Volunteers have been helping to restore and manage Chiwaukee Prairie since it became a State Natural Area in 1967. These volunteer efforts are coordinated by the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund, Inc (a 501(c)(3)) organization. The area was once platted for residential development but the Great Depression, and later the growing recognition of the area's rare ecological value, stopped full development and left a patchwork of homes and natural area. In 2016 **volunteers cut invasive brush and applied herbicide, removed truck loads each of garlic mustard, hawkweed, common St. John's wort, and Queen Anne's lace, and foliar sprayed purple loosestrife, hairy willow herb, black swallowwort, mullein and exotic thistles.** They also mowed trails and firebreaks, assisted DNR with prescribed burns, routinely scouted roadsides for trash and new invasives, and monitored several rare plant species. — *Pam Holy*



Mazomanie Oak Barrens: 2016 provided some new challenges. In March we basal bark sprayed a large clone of black locust trees (~750) that were growing in a private in-holding within the natural area, and posing an obvious threat to the site. Fortunately, three mornings of freezing temperatures froze the newly forming leaves and that frost killed all but a few of them. We cut the trees in late December and burning will occur in 2017. A very wet

spring and summer allowed honeysuckle seedlings and mullein to show their nasty capabilities, which kept us busy most of late summer and fall. We have gotten ahead of the spotted knapweed but the rains also increased germination in higher numbers than anticipated. The good news is that very few reached seed producing stage and we hope that 2017 will require less time to control the knapweed. **The site is slowly taking shape and we are pleased with the overall structure of the site.** We had a group of 17 students from Sauk Prairie High School join us in September to collect seed and start clearing a dense stand of Buckthorn and Prickly Ash in a low area of the site. — *Bob Hay and Jim Trumphy*

Muralt Bluff Prairie (Stauffacher Unit): Prairie Bluff chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts collected seeds for the prairie plantings, cut and stacked brush and provided volunteers for all SNA workdays at Stauffacher. — *Tom Mitchell*

Pope Lake: Summer workdays focused on the mucky but fun work of cutting and removing invasive cattails from the wetland with the plan of returning the area to wild rice. Efforts in the adjacent woods to remove barberry and winged euonymus have been expanding. The UW-Oshkosh invasive species class even got involved in the pulling. — *Jared Urban*

Ridgeway Pine Relict: Efforts have continued to convert old fields adjacent to pine relicts back to prairie. Acres of land have been cleared and the resulting piles scatter the field. In 2017 we plan more brush control and burning efforts. Prairie seeds from plantings have been collected and sown in the two areas where a healthy response of indian grass, stiff goldenrod, wild bergamont and other forbs were seen this summer. — *Jared Urban*

Rock River: Thanks to persistent and consistent management of invasive species, spotted knapweed and yellow sweet clover continue to decline. Large areas of brush have been cleared and seeded with an increasing amount of collected seed. New efforts have begun to control oriental bittersweet. — *Jared Urban*

Rocky Run: The benefits of last year's restoration efforts were evident this summer, with an abundance of native prairie species reclaiming a field where red cedar, autumn olive, buckthorn and spotted knapweed had been removed the previous year. Work this summer focused on treating additional areas for knapweed and foliar spraying of buckthorn resprouts. Volunteer groups also met again in winter to remove cedar, pine, and brush invading sand prairie habitat. The DNR and adjacent landowner began removal of a red pine plantation on the northwest side of the property. Volunteer groups assisted with cleanup and prepping the area for seeding with native plants. — *Jeff Lorch*

Southern Kettle Moraine SNAs: 2016 was another busy year as we continued our work to clear brush and spread locally collected seeds in the headwaters area of Bluff Creek. White sweet clover and parsnip were removed from the prairie downstream. Whitewater Oak Opening (CF Messenger SNA) also received a good deal of attention from our very well attended brushcutting days; in fact, I believe we set a new attendance record with 28 volunteers! The workdays from fall through early spring continue to draw new people as well as returning volunteers, which leads to our steady growth. We collected seeds from Kettle Moraine Oak Opening and Young Prairie to be used in appropriate areas nearby where we removed brush. The seed collecting days continue to be popular and family friendly leading to great numbers of attendees. Clover Valley Fen received its first workday from the group this year when we girdled aspen encroaching on some fen mounds.

As a volunteer leader **I'm very excited to see people returning and learning more each time they attend. More and more people are starting to see the big picture and appreciate our SNAs.**

One of the biggest improvements for us was the introduction of our job trailer and the supplied tooling. This has made workdays easier to prepare for and equip in changing conditions as well as enable us to have appropriate safety gear and tools nearby at all times. I believe it will also provide for continued growth and recruitment as the volunteers see how much we are valued by our friends in the NHC bureau of the DNR. Thank you!!! — *Zach Kastern*



Volunteer tool trailer

York Prairie: We had another productive year at the York Prairie SNA. Our seed collecting outings started in June, with the upland sedges, and continued every 10 days throughout the summer until our final collection in November for showy goldenrod. We gathered many species and many bags of seeds for the fall planting at Stauffacher restoration. We also hosted two events for the Natural Resources Foundation. Seed collection requires a thorough knowledge and constant inspection of the SNA so we are usually aware of patches of invasive species and their stage of growth. A note to the DNR always produces a field crew who effectively attack the invasives. **It is very satisfying to feel one is encouraging natives and eliminating invasives.** It was a good year. — *Heidi Hankley and Jim MacDonald*



Muralt Bluff Prairie (Stauffacher Unit)

New Places in 2016

Volunteer groups started up at new sites in 2016.

Hardscrabble Prairie: Lindsay Knudsvig, a volunteer from the Kettle Moraine region, has brought his skills to Hardscrabble. Work focused on removal of honeysuckle, buckthorn, cedar, and aspen around the remnant prairies and under large oaks. During the summer other invasive plants like white sweet clover and wild parsnip were located and removed. Follow up on winter brush work occurred and seed was collected for speeding up the recovery of prairie edges.

Observatory Hill: A large-scale timber harvest is leading to dramatic changes at this site, a long-ago haunt of famed naturalist John Muir. Workdays every few months focused on returning the site to an oak savanna. Volunteers focused on forest invasives like garlic mustard and Japanese hedge parsley with herbicides and brushsaws. In the fall seeds were collected from nearby oak openings and will be scattered on site this fall. A highlight was getting to know the experienced volunteers living adjacent to the property and consistently seeing new faces.

Sugar River Wetlands: The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association partnered with DNR to begin changing a brushy section of bike trail back to a wetland. With regular monthly workdays we saw over 100 volunteers come help out! Lots of invasive brush succumbed to brushpile fires; follow up herbicide work was conducted in June; aspen were girdled, seed was collected, a second follow-up occurred in the fall, and prairie and wetland seed was



Hardscrabble Prairie

planted in December.

Waubesa Wetlands: Former State Natural Areas crew member Alex Wenthe has taken on work at this site by spraying re-sprouts from mowing work during the winter. Brush removal and garlic mustard in the woods adjacent to the wetland has started. More is in the works for 2017.



Sugar River Wetlands



Seed for Observatory Hill

Why we do what we do

After spending 40 years behind a desk the thought of 40 (more or less) days in the wilderness was appealing to me. What began as a way to fill free time quickly morphed into a passion for restoring and preserving nature. The DNR personnel and volunteer leaders are a wellspring of knowledge and encouragement. With environmental concerns mounting it is crucial that volunteers protect and enhance our natural resources. I am honored to be a part of that great effort. — **Gerry Peterson**



Sugar River Wetlands

My favorite experience in 2016 was seeing the headwaters of Bluff Creek emerge from a fog of invasive species due to the work of the SE Wisconsin volunteer group. I have been visiting this area of bubbling springs for decades and enjoying my favorite skunk cabbage sending its peaky cap upwards in early spring. Now we can see the large spring pool through the scattered oaks. I'm so grateful for the volunteers that show up, sometimes 20 or more for our monthly workdays, and for the camaraderie in nature we all enjoy. —**Ginny Coburn**

I volunteer because there is so much work to be done to restore and maintain the natural environment, and there will never be enough resources to get this work done without volunteer help. — **Gary Hess**



Pope Lake - Photo © Marilyn Dixon



Empire Prairies

Volunteering with the SNA crew has become one of favorite pastimes over the last year. I grew up on a small dairy farm in southern Wisconsin so hard work and caring for the land is in my veins. **But when I show up the thing that excites me the most is the camaraderie of the volunteers.** There is nothing more remarkable than seeing 30 or so people willing to give up time on a weekend morning to help out. Really any number of volunteers will do but the more the merrier! For me volunteering has been a very educational experience and I have benefited a lot from networking with the other volunteers. I hope to learn more yet and have the opportunity share what I have learned with others! — **Dennis Haak**



Rock River Prairie



Ridgeway Pine Relict– Photo © Mary Kay Baum



Maiden Rock Bluff

Join us! Discover how you can help care for our natural heritage. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search “SNA volunteers”

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